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ABSTRACT

Working parents may miss work to look for child care, to cover for a breakdown in care, or to care for a sick child. Employers can reduce family-related absences by providing on-site child care and referral services, improving the quality and reliability of community child care centers, or increasing parents' ability to afford better care. Allowing sick leave for family reasons does not reduce absenteeism, but it does reduce the tension associated with having to lie about the reason. There is evidence to suggest that these absences do not necessarily translate into lower productivity. Recommendations relating to the complicated relationship between work and family include: better measures, research tools, and methodologies; more pooling of firms' anonymous needs assessments; analysis of on-site centers' sick policies; research on parents who work nonstandard hours; work-family conflicts of welfare women with young children; and on the effects of work-family issues within different industries, different size companies, different regions of the country, and different income groups; and a mechanism for translating and disseminating this research to companies. (The paper includes an exhibit describing 16 studies of welfare women with young children; and on the effects of work-family issues of employer-supported child care, 5 data tables, and 50 references.) (CML)

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The Conference Board

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27. IMPACT OF CHILD CARE ON THE BOTTOM LINE

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The Conference Board

"Employers have a major role in helping parents find needed child care, but I do not support give-aways of taxpayer dollars to get business to recognize what it already knows: that it must provide assistance for more and better child care. Workers demand it; productivity demands it; a business bottom-line demands it."

George Bush, 1988

This quote indicates that public policy is about to be shaped by the belief that companies get a return on their investments in child care. There seems to be a growing perception within government and business that what's good for the family is good for business.

Some of this perception is based on the common sense belief that those with fewer problems at home will be better workers. Some believe because they work in companies that have already responded to the child care needs of their employees. Others believe in the bottom-line effects of child care based on research. Whether based on beliefs or data, this link is necessary before senior management will consider providing child care support.

There is limited research available to substantiate the effects of child care problems and programs. With numerous methodological problems, it would be easy for an unsympathetic manager -- a skeptic of

company involvement in family issues--to poke holes in the findings. It is almost impossible to prove a cause and effect relationship between various child care supports and productivity. There are so many other factors that affect work behavior. The examination of child care factors must be seen in context.

Bearing in mind the methodological flaws and the broader influences on overall work performance, this paper now reviews the available research on child care and its workplace effects. Although conclusions from the research are modest, they offer the richest opportunity to question our basic definitions of productivity, stress, corporate culture, and work-family conflict. Although the research may pose more questions than answers, there is a consistency to the findings that suggests patterns in the definitions of problems and the effects of work-family solutions. The work-family nexus is very complex, and so is the research on it.

From the attempts to research it, there are many insights to be gleaned. This paper explores some of those insights. They may be related to the way in which productivity is negatively affected by unmet child care problems and the way it might be positively affected by company efforts to solve those problems. The research on the effects of child care problems is much stronger than the research on the effects of child care programs. For instance, we know much more about how often parents are absent due to sick children, than we do about how a child care center might affect absenteeism.

Very few companies have evaluated their child care initiatives. Companies seem more interested in research that helps them decide

whether to pursue a child care response than in how to select and implement an effective response. The research that does exist in this latter category is where the methodology is flawed. But because the purpose of the research is to convince the skeptics and not instruct those who plan to implement, companies seem satisfied with the limited findings.

This paper will focus on the research relating child care problems to their effects on absenteeism and tardiness. This research is based largely on the results of needs assessments that companies have conducted in order to determine the prevalence and nature of family problems among employees. (The research on turnover and productivity is more relevant to other work-family problems and will not be reviewed in this paper.) Next will come a review of findings from studies on the effects of sponsoring a child care center.

The Importance of Researching Bottom-Line Effects

Less than 10 percent of large employers or less than 1 percent of all employers provide any form of child care support. The estimated 4,000 employers with child care policies or programs represent dramatic growth during the past five years, and the numbers are expected to increase in the future. However, the vast majority of employers have not responded. Some of the inaction is due to the lack of clear -- or well-publicized -- evidence that child care problems or programs affect the bottom-line.

Companies today wish to aviod losses of time or talent in view of an increased concern about productivity. In a time of labor shortages,

economic growth may depend on getting more from each employee, since there will be fewer of them. Workforce growth during the next 15 years at least, will be provided by women. About 80 percent of these women are in their childbearing years and most will get pregnant at some point in their careers. Slightly more than half (51 percent) will return to work within one year of giving birth (O'Connell and Bloom, 1987). And last, but not least, a growing number of employees will need to provide care for their aging parents or in-laws (Opinion Research Corporation, 1988).

Workforce 2000, a Hudson Institute report commissioned by the U.S. Department of Labor concluded that while progress has been made, women still tend to be channeled into traditional female-stereotyped occupations. Adequate child care is still not generally available, and rigid work schedules continue to act as barriers to greater utility of working women (1987; p. xx).

Though women traditionally bear primary responsibility for family care, 60 percent of men have working wives, and an increasing number are taking on more family responsibilities. Research also suggests that when men take on such burdens, they are not immune to their negative effects (Burden & Googins, 1987).

Since the rationale for involvement in family supports is based on the link to productivity, how do family responsibilities affect work behavior? What does a company lose by not responding? And what do they save by providing a response?

The Effects of Work-Family Problems on the Bottom-Line

The relationship between family and work -- in both its negative and positive forms -- is dynamic. It is not just that families affect work or that work affects family. It is that both families and work are changing and each alteration affects the relationship between the two. It is the constancy, intensity and rapidity of change that make the work-family nexus so dynamic.

Work-family relationships will change over time. There will be different problems at different stages of life and at different levels of job responsibility. The sources of conflict will differ, as will their impact. This section looks at the various sources of work-family conflict and then examines the specific effects of unresolved child care problems.

With whatever we learn about effects on the bottom-line, it is important to realize that the family will bear a greater burden of work-family conflict than will work. The Fortune study found that both men and women were likely to report that their jobs interfered with their families. (32 percent of men and 41 percent of women). But only 16 percent of men and 18 percent of women felt that family interfered with their jobs (Galinsky and Hughes, 1987). Similarly, Fernandez (1986) found that 39 percent of women and 13 percent of men reported stress on the job due to their dual roles at work and home. However, 43 percent of women and 22 percent of men felt their dual roles created stress at home. In the study at Merck & Co., 18 percent of men and 21 percent of women reported that their families interfered with their jobs as opposed

to 37 percent of the men and 41 percent of the women who said that their jobs interfered with their family (See Table 1).

One study found that 59 percent of employees rated their "family performance" good or unusually good versus 86 percent who gave a good rating to their job performance. The study concludes, "The balance is not even and the job takes priority" (Emlen, 1987).

The Level of Work-Family Conflict

Despite the numbers of employees who do report that their work and family lives are in conflict, substantial numbers of workers do not report such conflict. In a study of 20 hospitals in the Sisters of Providence network in the Pacific Northwest, on average, two-thirds to three-fourths of the work force does not perceive difficulty combining work and family responsibilities. The difficulty is three to six times higher among those employees who have child care or elder care responsibilities. In addition, the study concludes that, "the perceived difficulty in combining work and family...by no means encompasses or exhausts the kinds of difficulties or stresses that arise within either role. There are other issues -- other than the balancing act itself -- that are perceived to be of greater specific concern to employees, such as job stress on the one hand and difficulty finding child care on the other." (Emlen, 1987).

In eight company needs assessments, the percent of employees reporting work-family conflict ranged from 23 to 64 percent. Five of the eight companies had more than 50 percent of employees reporting some work-family conflict. Exempt employees report a slightly higher amount

of conflict than the non-exempt. Women report more conflict than men, and parents report more conflict than nonparents.

Sources of Work-Family Conflict

There are numerous sources of work-family conflict. The work sphere creates some, and others begin at home. The following list separates the job and family factors that may result in conflict as concluded from various studies.

A. The job leads to work-family conflict when the employee:

- works long hours;
- has a burdensome schedule involving overtime, weekend work, travel demands or some shift work;
- has little control over the hours worked;
- has little autonomy in the job;
- is very absorbed in the job;
- has no job security;
- changes jobs either due to promotion, layoff or relocation;
- has a more physically or mentally demanding job;
- has a negative social climate at work;
- has unsupportive co-workers;
- has an insensitive supervisor;
- has inflexible work policies.

B. Families lead to work-family conflict when the employee:

- has a disapproving spouse;
- has inequities in his/her marriage;
- has an unequal division of home labor;
- has children, especially preschoolers;
- has had unstable child care arrangements;
- has elder care responsibilities, especially when provided at a distance.

Many work-family conflicts lead to stress. They relate to the way in which one role affects performance in the other. Often called "negative spillover" by researchers (Evans and Bartolome, 1979; Crouter, 1984), it can affect concentration on the job and, ultimately, productivity. Additionally, severe stress can lead to absence.

Another set of work-family conflicts is derived from time demands -- either the number of hours that work and family responsibilities require, or scheduling problems, where it becomes physically impossible to be in two places at the same time. Absence or productivity loss may result. Burden and Googins found that married mothers spend approximately 85 hours per week on work, household chores, and child care. Married fathers spend 66 hours per week on these tasks. Single mothers spend about 75 hours per week on home, work, and kids. (It is not clear why having a husband adds 10 hours to a woman's workload.)

For many employees, particularly women, the combining of work and family responsibilities amounts to almost two full-time jobs. It is not

surprising that these workers require different accommodations than the typical, male breadwinner of the past.

Surprisingly, corporate America has been able to absorb women into the work force over the past 20 years without making many changes in their benefits, work schedules or productivity incentives. Policies are also out of synch with the men who are becoming increasingly involved in childrearing. Most other institutions, such as schools and government agencies, have not accommodated the needs of working parents either. As a result, stress, scheduling and time conflicts plague a growing number of workers.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the research on absenteeism related to child care problems.

The Effects of Child Care Problems

Parents may have difficulty getting to work when their children are ill or when their child care breaks down. Parents unable to find or afford high quality child care may experience more breakdown and more absences.

About two-thirds of women and two-fifths of men with preschoolers miss between one and five days per year due to family concerns. In a three-company study of about 1,000 employees in New Jersey, 49 percent of women and 27 percent of men missed work at least once because of child care problems. About twice as many women as men miss work due to child care problems (Galinsky, 1987a).

Among five companies, the average number of days per year that working mothers report absences is 1.5 days. For fathers, the number of

days missed is .6. In a study at the Adolph Coors Company, 55 employees missed an average of 2.6 days within a six month period. Cumulatively, these parents missed 230 days due to child care problems, or 460 days per year. The reasons for these absences break down as follows:

146 days (63 percent) due to sick children;

65 days (28 percent) due to the search for child care;

19 days (8 percent) due to breakdown in child care.

Each of these three child care reasons for absence are explored below.

Sick Children. Children under the age of 12 get sick an average of five days per year. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents to the Fortune study said that finding care for a sick child was a big problem. Fernandez (1986) found that sick child care was at the top of a list of 15 possible child care problems (p. 20). The problem was bigger for women than men, where 45 percent of women and 17 percent of men indicated that providing care for a sick child was at least somewhat of a problem. In the Burden-Googins study (1987), women employees were twice as likely as men to have to stay home with a sick child (65 percent compared to 32 percent).

Whether a parent will stay home with a sick child depends on the nature of the illness, the availability of back-up support, the policies of the company, and the personal inclinations of the parent.

Some parents feel they should be with a sick child. In a study at Manville Corporation, among 17 percent of employees who had lost time from work due to sick children, 65 percent gave the reason of not wanting to leave the child home alone. Another 25 percent didn't know a

provider, and 22 percent couldn't afford one. The value that one places on certain family relationships and responsibilities will affect job motivation and, ultimately, the employee's desire to go to work.

Finding Child Care. There are three basic problems associated with finding child care. First, there may not be an adequate supply of the care being sought. This is common among those looking for infant care, after-school care, sick child care, and part-time care or care during odd hours. The second problem associated with finding child care is that the care may be too expensive, so that the search must continue until affordable care is found. Third, what does exist is sometimes hard to find. As a result of these problems, the search is often time consuming, frustrating and may not result in satisfactory arrangements. The Fortune study revealed that parents who had problems finding child care were more likely to be absent.

Emlen found that employed mothers with children under age 12 who report difficulty finding child care are twice as likely to make arrangements with which they are dissatisfied, twice as likely to report worry or stress about child care, twice as likely to say that combining work and family responsibilities is difficult, and many times, almost invariably, more likely to feel that child care is difficult to continue or maintain. These difficulties reach the work place in the form of time lost and stress (Emlen, 1987, p. 92).

Paying for Quality Child Care: In many communities, finding quality child care is difficult because very little exists or because what exists is too expensive. As Arthur Emlen concluded in his 33-company study in Oregon, "Employees with child care affordability

problems have less money and are frustrated in their expectations. They are willing to pay more for child care, but what they are looking for is harder to find, and they end up less satisfied with what they do find" (p. 54).

Some parents benefit from having relatives provide care. Several national studies indicate that about 40 percent of parents rely on relatives. In the Sisters of Providence study, 40 percent of fathers and 20 percent of mothers did not pay for child care. Of whose who did, 13 percent of fathers and 27 percent of mothers said it was very difficult.

The national estimates of the average annual cost of child care run between $2,000 and $3,000 (Hofferth, 1989). Family income often determines child care expenses. In actual dollars, two-paycheck families pay the most for child care, but after controlling for family income and other demographic factors, single mothers pay the most (Shinn, et. al., 1988).

Sustaining Child Care Arrangements. There are many reasons why a parent is forced into a last minute scramble to find new child care arrangements. Child care breakdowns are likely to occur when the care is unreliable or when there is one caregiver, such as in family day care or in-home care, who has become incapacitated. The back-up arrangements that parents make largely determine whether the breakdown will result in an absence. Unreliable care can be a function of several things: the number of arrangements that parents use to cover their work hours; the form of care; and the quality of the care, which is by and large an issue of affordability.

The other source of absence resulting from breakdown may be related to the stress that a breakdown in care causes. The Fortune Magazine survey found that a third of parents who experienced child care breakdowns were nervous or frequently stressed, as compared to 17 percent of those who did not have trouble maintaining their child care arrangements.

The absence need not be for a full day. Parents whose child care had broken down were more likely to come to work late or leave early. About 39 percent of parents had come to work late or left early, with 20 percent doing so three or more times. Of those who missed part of the work day, 72 percent had done so because of family obligations (Fortune). In a survey at a large insurance company in the mid-west almost half of parents had been late or left early at least five times due to child care breakdowns.

The number of days that employees arrived late or left early due to family obligations averaged about 1.8 days per employee per six months. Women have twice as many latenesses or early departures as men (women average 2.4 days among five companies; the men averaged 1.2 days).

The Fortune study also found that 40 percent of parents had experienced a breakdown in child care within the previous three months. The three-company study in New Jersey found 63 percent of parents with recent breakdowns, with 22 percent having had three or more. The Oregon companies found only 10 percent of parents having recently changed their child care arrangement - women twice as likely as men.

The number of breakdowns varied among the four companies for which data were available. The average number of breakdowns reported by women

was 2.9, for men the number was 2.4. In two companies, exempt men and women had more breakdowns than non-exempt employees.

Home care is associated with the least disruption of work. Out-of-home child care is associated with being late, leaving early and missing days. The greatest number of interruptions results from children looking after themselves (Emlen).

Absence resulting from child care breakdowns was less frequent among parents with higher incomes and other children. Although child care broke down with equal frequency for employed fathers whose wives worked and for employed mothers who husbands worked, the women were twice as likely to miss work as a result. Among working mothers, having a husband -- even having a husband at home -- did not affect the frequency of missing work (Shinn, et. al., 1988).

Summary

With so many sources of conflict, it is a wonder that working parents have managed to keep a job or to be productive at all! Company needs assessments are beginning to pinpoint where companies may be losing valuable time and talent due to unsolved child care problems, or to the inevitable consequences of combining work and family life. By distinguishing between the avoidable and the inevitable, companies can better understand their options. By helping to patch up problems in the child care market, employers may prevent the absences due to breakdowns. By accepting the fact that women will get pregnant and need some time off, or that children will get sick and need their parents, employer

responses will focus on allowing more time off, with the expectation that a grateful employee will work better or longer for that firm.

The research only begins to examine the interactive effects of various problems and solutions. For instance, Emlen (1987) found that companies with lower percentages of employees reporting absenteeism have high percentages reporting stress related to child care. Emlen speculates that the ability to take time off when needed, functions as a safety valve (p. 27). In order for this finding to have practical significance, corporate decision-makers must accept the notion that accommodations to family needs -- particularly more time off -- will ultimately result in an improvement on the bottom line. A leap of faith is required for companies to become more flexible and tolerant of family-related absences, since there is very little research that calculates the return on investment.

Another theme in the research relates to gender differences. While women have more responsibility for child care, men are equally subject to its negative effects when they have the responsibility. Shinn (1988) observes that although men rarely miss work due to child care, when they do, they feel more stress about it than women. Shinn questions whether this is a function of a corporate culture that punishes men who let the family take priority, or the societal norms that stigmatize men who deal with child care (p. 74).

In an analysis of 23 data sets from 18 studies of absence, gender was found to explain less than one percent of the sum of all causes of work absences. (Job satisfaction explained 4 percent; true illness explained the most -- 33 percent) (Haccoun, 1988).

The authors of several studies consistently conclude that absenteeism is not related to gender, but to family status. For instance, Emlen found that in two-earner families, mothers missed 50 percent more days per year than men. He concludes that absence is an agreed-upon solution between spouses. Economics or values could play a role in determining that it is a more reasonable solution for the woman to stay home (p. 48).

The problems specifically related to finding, paying for or sustaining a child care arrangement underscore the fragile foundation upon which the balancing of work and family relies. The cost and instability of child care lead parents to second-best or last minute child care -- both of which often lead to dissatisfaction with child care and interference with work.

As a growing number of companies try to prevent the work interruptions caused by inadequate child care, it becomes necessary to ask the obvious question: Do child care supports solve the problem and save the company money? The one option that can address most of the market failures simultaneously is the on-site child care center. It's easily found, usually subsidized, and almost always of very high quality. Are the problems of finding, paying for or sustaining child care solved by an employer-sponsored center at or near the workplace? How will it affect the inevitable problems such as sick children? With an understanding of the effects of child care <u>problems</u>, we now look at the effects of child care programs, and in particular, the on- or near-site child care center.

The Effects of Child Care Programs

There is little research on specific work-family solutions and their ability to reduce the negative effects of work-family conflicts. The limited body of research conducted over the past 20 years on the effects of the on- or near-site child care center reveals interesting effects.

The context for this discussion is whether benefits -- of any type -- are capable of affecting productivity and other work behaviors. Classic management theory, based largely on the work of Fredrick Herzberg in the 1950's suggests that there are motivators, which are those job characteristics that would cause people to work harder, and satisfiers, which are job characteristics that make the job more agreeable. Motivators, it would seem, are more closely related to productivity. Satisfiers are very important, especially in keeping people, but they do not necessarily make people perform their jobs better.

Motivators include those things that are intrinsic to the job, such as a chance for advancement and involvement in decisions. Satisfiers include such things as good benefits and working conditions. Herzberg found that benefits, although extrinsic to the job, had the ability to make people feel dissatisfied and perform poorly. If the adequacy of satisfiers goes below a certain level, they can reduce productivity, but if they rise to an optimum level, they would not increase productivity. He concludes, "The opposite of job satisfaction is no satisfaction and similarly, the opposite of job dissatisfaction is not satisfaction, but no job dissatisfaction (Herzberg, 1968, p. 57).

While Herzberg's theory is plausible, it is basically untested among today's workers -- baby boomers with a completely different set of values than existed 20 years ago, and women, whose needs and expectations differ as well. For instance, the employer-employee contract is less viable; employees may be more committed to their work than to a particular firm; and people want more leisure time and are willing to make trade-offs to achieve a better quality of life. These changes may influence the way in which company benefits motivate employees or the level at which dissatisfaction sets in and ultimately affects work behaviors.

The other aspect of benefits that has changed is that they were primarily intended to support the occasional tragedies of life and not the day-to-day drudgeries of life. Corporations have been most generous in their efforts to protect employees from future and immediate disaster. They have not yet understood benefits as a way to reduce daily tensions and ongoing personal problems. This amounts to a fundamental change in employee benefits which is likely to result in a change of effects. There is already some evidence of this change in the growth of employee assistance programs and wellness and fitness programs. Work and family responses are beginning to feel more comfortable. Dealing with daily, personal problems at the workplace is making the corporation more of a social institution. Nowhere can the connection be more personal than when an employer provides care to the children of its workers in the form of an on-site child care center.

The studies evaluating the on-site center provide a unique opportunity to look at the potential for benefits to improve job

satisfaction and motivation. We now look at the effects of the employer-sponsored child care center to understand more about the relationship between company accommodations and the bottom line.

The Employer-Sponsored Child Care Center

Of all the ways for companies to address the needs of working parents, the on- or near-site child care center has received the most attention. It represents the greatest commitment to becoming a more family-supportive employer. It is the most tangible option -- easiest for nonparent decision-makers to grasp; easiest for newspapers to photograph. And according to the research reported below, it can positively affect the bottom line -- not in the ways managers predict perhaps -- but there is certain payback for the companies willing to invest in this type of child care program for their employees. The research suggests that reduced turnover may be the most positive benefit of creating a worksite child care center.

Seventeen studies on employer-sponsored child care centers have been reviewed. (See Exhibit A) Six of them were empirical in nature, having compared the center users with other groups of employees who did not use the center. Control groups included users of other child care services, nonparents, or employees of a similar company that did not have a child care center. In some cases, these groups were surveyed up to a year before the center opened and up to two years after.

Another six studies involved evaluations conducted for a sponsoring employer. Five of the studies did not include pre-enrollment assessments. They were based on employee perceptions of effects after

having used the center for at least five months. Some of them evaluated the perceptions of managers to whom center users reported.

Another five studies surveyed multiple employers in an attempt to measure managers' perceptions in companies already providing child care or in companies that have yet to provide child care assistance.

The Problems in Research Design

One enormous contribution of this research is an illumination of the methodological problems that should be avoided in future research. One of the most important steps in experimental design is to be sure the groups being compared are well-matched. This is important in order to rule out the possibility that other differences between the groups -- besides the use of the center -- are responsible for the difference in outcomes.

In the first empirical study conducted in 1972 at the child care center sponsored by the Federal Office of Economic Opportunity, (OEO) the samples had enough differences to cast doubt on some of the findings. The non-user group, was two years older, less likely to include single parents (54% of non-users were married compared to 35% of the users), and they were more senior and better paid. These differences might account for fewer negative consequences of parenting among the comparison group despite their choice of child care.

In the 1989 study of a center created by a small North Carolina textile firm, employee behaviors were compared to those in another company with a very different culture. The company sponsoring the center was reported to be exceptional in their management of human

resources. In comparison to an industry-wide sample of firms, their employees indicated significantly more favorable work-related perceptions. The comparison group was described as needing an improvement in morale, absence and turnover. These differences favor the company sponsoring the center, especially since comparisons were made with the entire employee population, and not specifically users of the center.

The lack of a before and after comparison of the groups under study is what prevents the establishment of causality. One cannot conclude that the differences found between users and non-users did not exist before the center opened. This was a major flaw in the 1976 evaluation of the center created by Control Data and 12 other Minneapolis employers. The absenteeism rates for the three groups were not compared before the center opened. The observed differences might have existed then. It becomes difficult to assert that reduced absenteeism and turnover was caused by the company-sponsored child care center.

The importance of gathering ample information about the control group was underscored by the Control Data evaluation. No information was collected about the cost or quality of the child care arrangements used by employees whose children were not enrolled in the company-sponsored center. There was no explanation given about why those parents did not enroll their children in that center. The non-users' higher rates of absenteeism and turnover might have been due to the inferior quality and less stable arrangements they were forced to make.

As a result of these flaws in the research design, several authors question whether any solid conclusions can be drawn from the research.

The evaluators of the OEO study, concluded, "There is no evidence that OEO users of the CDC (Child Development Center) are absent or tardy less in 1972 than in 1971 before the CDC was in operation" (Krug, et. al. 1972).

As a result of the mismatched textile firms compared in North Carolina, the evaluators conclude, "The provision of the child care benefit did improve attitudes and work-related behavior for the treatment company" [the one with the center]. They cautioned, however, "Causality cannot be ascertained with certainty" (p. 95).

In a review of five center studies, the U.S. General Accounting Office (1986, p. 7) concluded that, "None of these studies, nor any other research came to our attention in this review, adequately established in our opinion a causal relationship between providing child care services and cited benefits to the employer."

In a review of these studies by Miller (1984) the author concludes, "Despite enthusiasm by some chief executive officers, public relations officials and child care advocates, assertions that employer-sponsored child care reduces workers' absenteeism or tardiness, or that it increases workers' productivity or job satisfaction are not supported by credible research" (p. 277).

What Can Be Learned

Despite these assertions, there is something to be learned from the research. One of the primary difficulties in executing this research is isolating the child care center from other workplace problems, policies or programs. This research dilemma actually sheds light on the center's

relationship to other company concerns and initiatives. For instance, the Burud, et. al. evaluation of Union Bank's center in California credits the center with reducing the length of maternity leave. Users of the center were out 1.2 weeks less than mothers using other forms of child care. However, once the infant program was filled, no more mothers could report that advantage. It is clear that the size of the infant program in the company's center will affect the overall impact on maternity leaves.

In the 1984 study of the child care center at the Catherine McAuley Health Center (CMHC) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, center users were found to have a higher level of satisfaction with their child care arrangements, but they also had more work-related problems caused by the arrangement than did users of the hospital's family day care program or other non-users. These problems did not occur frequently and were most often related to the need to stay late or leave early. Center users also experienced greater stress about child care, and more problems when children became ill. Non-user parents relying on in-home care had significantly fewer work-related problems caused by their arrangement than did family day care users. This study is helpful in showing that the center may not be a panacea for all child care problems. In fact, centers may create some new problems of their own.

Some companies fear that attendance problems may result from parent's frequent visits to the center. The study of the State of Florida's child care center found that while 62 percent indicated that the ability to visit their children during the day was important, only 10 percent visit regularly, and most made less than one visit per week.

Some of the studies suggest that the benefits of the center go beyond those employees able to use it. Co-workers are reported to be less strained because working parents are absent less often and are better able to concentrate. In the Union Bank study, some supervisors reported improved morale among co-workers of center users, and 60 percent of them reported that their own morale was improved. As one commented, "I would have to do her job if she were tardy or absent, so it's been good for me" (p. 10).

Another important question raised by the research is the relationship between the child care center and absenteeism. Consider the following findings:

- In the OEO center (Krug, 1972), the users used slightly more sick hours than non-users before the center opened. However, they also averaged a greater increase in sick leave after the center opened (up to 3.95 days per pay period for users vs. 3.17 days for the non-users). There were no explanations provided as to the reasons for increased sick leave.
- One year after the Union Bank center opened, employees using the center were absent 1.7 days less per year than other parents with children in child care. However, the absenteeism rate for center users didn't drop compared to a before enrollment measure. The authors point out that at least the absence rate didn't increase, as it did for non-users. They contend that children have the highest incidence of

illness during the first year they are in group care. They concluded that, "Absenteeism would be expected to drop during the second and subsequent years of the program's operation."

- In the study of New York State's child care center in Albany, fifty-five percent of users said the center had no effect on absenteeism. While 17 percent said their absences had been reduced due to the center, 19 percent said that absences increased. These were primarily parents of infants.
- In a comparison of 20 hospitals in the Sisters of Providence network, one of which had a center that was evaluated, the author concludes "No evidence was found to support the contention that on-site child care diminishes absenteeism" (p. 16). The hospital with on-site care had either average or worse absence rates than other sites. Hospital staff indicated that "the mere presence of an on-site facility does not necessarily reduce interruptions, lateness, and other absenteeism since there are still difficulties associated with getting children ready for the day, delivering them to be facility, and so forth" (Emlen, 1987).

While several other studies did report positive effects on absenteeism, these findings demonstrate the complexity of measuring

absenteeism -- and eradicating it. As noted earlier, some absenteeism may be healthy.

Analysis

The findings from these studies are most illuminating when comparing those that measured perceptions of change and those that measured actual behavior change. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the findings from the seventeen studies on employer-supported child care that have been analyzed for this paper. Table 2 presents findings from eight studies where the effects of child care were measured by manager perceptions. Table 3 presents the perceptions of employees who use the centers, and Table 4 shows the strength of findings from the empirical studies where differences between center users and some other comparison group were made.

Manager Perceptions

The eight studies reviewed here include three national surveys of multiple companies providing child care centers. Two of the eight studies on manager perceptions were conducted on statewide samples of employers who may or may not have had a child care program. The last three studies in this group measure the perceptions of managers who supervise center users. These eight studies represent perceptions of managers at varying degrees of closeness to the situation. Some samples include managers able to observe employee work performance, others who might hear news of effects within their organizations, and those who have formed opinions based on news reports and personal biases.

Not surprisingly, the managers least likely to perceive any positive effects of having a child care program were found in New York State where the overwhelming majority of employers were not providing any child care support. In a 1986 survey of 1,041 small, medium and large firms for the Governor's Task Force on Child Care, there was no outcome that more than 44 percent of managers believed would be positively affected. These managers were more unsure of the effects than they were knowledgeable about the absence of effect or a negative effect. Managers were most likely to expect an improvement in employee morale and a reduction in absenteeism, turnover and employee stress. These ratings are far below the other managerial ratings.

The New York State study is interesting in that it compares the views of small, medium and large firms. Table 5 indicates that the larger the company, the more likely the manager is to perceive a positive gain from having employer-sponsored child care. This may be an explanation for why the other statewide surveys of employers with and without child care support had ratings comparable to the managers working in companies with child care. The firms surveyed were primarily large.

Three national surveys of employers with some form of child care assistance were conducted in 1978, 1983 and 1984 (Perry, 1978; Magid, 1983; Burud, et. al. 1984). Collectively, they studied 440 firms, although it is unclear whether there was overlap in the samples. The majority of employers in all samples sponsored a child care center. Improved recruitment and decreased absenteeism were the two strongest perceived effects of child care initiatives.

The three centers whose evaluations included surveys of the supervisors of center users differ considerably in their top ratings of a center's potential effects. Improved morale was perceived to have been the greatest result in two of these studies.

Across all eight studies of managers' perceptions, morale is perceived to be the strongest outcomes of company-sponsored child care, with five of the eight employers giving it their highest ranking. Decreased absenteeism was the second most frequently mentioned benefit of a child care program. Managers from the Florida child care center gave absenteeism their top ranking, while four others had it as their second most perceived effect.

Parent Perceptions

Six studies surveyed the users of the child care centers. (See Table 3). These include three state-sponsored centers, two hospital-sponsored centers and one corporate program (Dominion Bankshares in Virginia). Generally, the percent of users reporting a positive effect on any of the measures presented is higher than the percentages of managers reporting such effects. There is far less consistency in the outcomes perceived by parents across these particular studies. Two of the surveys reported morale as the most likely benefit of center use. Employees also were likely to believe that they were absent less and produced more because of the child care center.

Actual Outcomes

In the six experimental studies conducted between 1972 and 1988, with 12 different possible effects tested, the strongest effect of an employer-sponsored child care center appears to be reduced turnover. Four of the six studies found statistically significant differences in turnover rates among center users and a comparison group. (One of the studies was a cost/benefit analysis with a comparison group and did not conduct statistical tests).

Recruitment is the next most positive outcome, with two studies showing statistically significant findings on a measure that asked whether the employee's acceptance of employment at the firm was related to the child care center. Statistically significant findings also occurred on a measure that asked whether center users were more likely to recommend the employer because of the center. Such recommendations are likely to improve recruitment efforts.

One of the most curious findings suggested by several of the studies is the variable and questionable impact of the center on absenteeism. One would expect absences to decrease among center users based on program stability and quality. This seems to be confirmed, or at least consistently found among the studies. Provider illness or program breakdown was not found to be a source of absence. However, absence due to sick children is another story. As mentioned earlier, several studies reported increased absenteeism among center users, or that absenteeism was higher among center users than it was for those in the control group. The reasons were largely sick children.

The incidence of absence related to company-sponsored centers may be a function of the center's policy and provision for sick children. Many company centers have stricter sick policies than community centers and are less likely to admit mildly ill children. One reason for this stricter policy is an enormous concern about liability. Secondly, the company's absenteeism rate could skyrocket should the illness become an epidemic. At a community center, on the other hand, parent absences due to an epidemic would be distributed among a number of employers. As a result, these studies imply that on- or near-site centers may not reduce absenteeism due to sick children unless they make special provision for sick child care. [Note: In checking this finding with several directors of on-site centers, most agreed that the policy for sick children affected parents' absences. However, some felt that because the parents were in closer proximity to the center, the child with a low-grade fever could be observed for a few hours without the parent having to leave work. Also, the parent using an on-site center is able to administer medications, where another parent whose program is farther away might have to miss work to give such medicine.]

It is not clear from the research whether the possible increase in absenteeism due to sick children is offset by the reduction of absenteeism due to fewer breakdowns, provider illnesses, or worries over quality as the result of having a child care center.

Perceptions Versus Reality

When comparing the three tables that summarize the findings from the seventeen studies reviewed, there is a startling difference in the

outcomes perceived to occur by employees and managers and those that did occur as reported in the experimental studies. In the experimental studies, the primary benefit of an employer-sponsored child care center is reduced turnover and improved recruitment. Managers and center users are more likely to perceive improved morale as the greatest benefit of a center. Managers across studies agree that absenteeism can be reduced and employees are more likely to report an improvement in productivity.

While all effects received generally favorable ratings from managers and employees, the actual benefits of a child care center as determined by empirical research may be very different than expected. This is important if companies are to establish realistic expectations for their programs. Also, given labor shortages and the competition that will exist among employers, turnover and recruitment may be the most important benefit of all, providing a more compelling reason for companies to consider an on- or near-site child care center.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

While there are many kinds of work-family conflicts and numerous policies and programs that can address them, this paper focused on absenteeism caused by child care problems and the effects of an employer-sponsored child care center. Working parents may miss work to look for child care, to cover for a breakdown in care, or care for a sick child. The on-site center makes things easy -- until it's filled. It will eliminate breakdowns, since these centers are highly stable. But they may not solve absence due to sick children, unless provisions are made for sick care.

There are many other ways to reduce family-related absences. Referral services can shorten the search time for parents. Breakdowns in care can be reduced by improving the quality and reliability of community-centers or increasing parents' ability to afford better care. Allowing sick leave for family reasons will not reduce absenteeism, but it will reduce the tension associated with having to lie about the reason. Furthermore there is evidence to suggest that these absences do not necessarily translate into lowered productivity. The employee's gratitude for the flexibility -- and the permission -- to tend to family needs is expressed by working at home or after hours to make up the work.

It is clear that some absenteeism due to family responsibilities is inevitable. Expecting perfect attendance -- from anyone -- is unrealistic and has been shown to result in increased stress. Stress often leads to absenteeism.

This analysis makes clear the cyclical nature of the relationship between work and family. Family problems affect work, and lack of accommodation at work further impacts the family, which may eventually spill over to work. Addressing work-family conflicts can be a hydraulic process: a solution created to solve one problem, may create problems in another area. The possibility that an on-site center increases absenteeism due to sick children is an example. It is critical that we begin to sort out the complexities of this relationship to reduce hardships both at home and at work. The need to better understand this complicated relationship is the basic theme of the recommendations below.

1. **There is a need for more research, but not research whose main purpose is to connect child care and the bottom-line.** Company needs assessments are an exception because they serve a planning function and they also validate the data for the individual employer. Experimental research, however, has to progress to a new level that acknowledges the complexities of the problem and the multiple solutions that companies offer.

   It is becoming increasingly difficult to evaluate one company program or policy because companies are typically packaging a set of responses. Attributing causality to any one solution is almost impossible. What is useful is an understanding of the change in culture that results from all such new initiatives and how the culture, in its entirety, affects working parents.

2. **Develop better measures, research tools, and methodologies to create research that will yield reliable data.** With the need for more sophisticated hypotheses and comparisons, it is critical that researchers be equipped with more sophisticated research tools.

3. **More pooling of firms' anonymous needs assessments would help build a base of data on sources of work-family conflict.**

4. An analysis of on-site centers' sick policies as compared to community-based centers would shed light on the effects of these policies on parents' absenteeism rates. Companies can develop more realistic expectations and better design a balance between internal absence policy and the centers' sick policy. Other centers could recognize the effects as well.

5. Research that compares the effects of work-family issues within:

   - different industries;
   - different size companies;
   - different regions of the country;
   - different communities (size, rural/urban/ suburban);
   - different ethnic groups;
   - different income groups, especially low and middle income groups.

6. Study parents who work non-standard hours. Very little is known about the survival patterns of those who work on shifts, especially when the spouses work on different shifts. Working evening hours may create all sorts of new logistical dilemmas that call for unique and innovative company responses.

7. Research is needed on the work-family conflicts of the welfare women with young children who must now work.

It is important to see what levels of accommodation are necessary to reduce negative work-on-family consequences. Although it is assumed that, like the majority of mothers, welfare mothers should work, too, the research clearly shows that the family is negatively affected when the woman is not doing what she wants. Forcing mothers to work who want to be home with their children may have serious negative consequences on work, unless work policies and support services are tailored to these unique needs.

8. A mechanism for translating and disseminating this research to companies is important. Many companies are beyond the anecdotal estimates of cost savings. The more complicated the research gets, the more companies are going to need an interpreter of results so they can be used to influence policy.

EXHIBIT A

17 STUDIES OF EMPLOYER-SUPPORTED CHILD CARE

RESEARCH SITE	RESEARCHER/CITE	SAMPLE	RESEARCH DESIGN	MAJOR FINDINGS
Federal OEO-Washington, D.C.	Krug, et. al. (1972)	50 parents from center 50 in control group	Pre/post test of users compared to control group	Center users had greater increase in sick leave. Annual leave taken by users decreased after center opened, it decreased more for non-users
Control Data Consortium - Minneapolis, MN	Milkovich & Gomez (1976)	30 center users; 30 parent non-users; 30 non-parents	Post-test of center users compared to 2 control groups	Lower employee absenteeism and turnover rates were related to enrollment in the center, while no relationship to job performance was found
North Carolina, Textile Firm	Youngblood, et. al. (1984)	410 people in company with center and 3 divisions of another firm with no center	Comparisons of employees in firm with center and those in firm without	Center users higher on job satisfaction, commitment, organizational climate, and lower on turnover. 19% drop in absenteeism and 63% drop in turnover rate in company with center
Multiple Companies-National	Dawson, et. al. (1988)	311 employees in 29 companies with various child care programs	Post-test of employees using various company-sponsored child care programs	Program users likely to recommend employer, continue with company, work overtime. Child care affected acceptance of promotion. Center yields greater effects than referrals or financing

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RESEARCH SITE	RESEARCHER/CITE	SAMPLE	RESEARCH DESIGN	MAJOR FINDINGS
Catherine McAuley Health Center-Ann Arbor, MI	Marquart (1988)	86 parents using hospital-based child care center or family day care program; matched to group of other child care users	Pre/post test of hospital center users compared to users of hospital-sponsored family day care and parents using other child care	Users had decreased absences of 1½ days per employee. Recruitment, retention and recommending employer more likely among users. No differences in job satisfaction, stress or turnover
Union Bank-Los Angeles, CA	Burud, et. al. (1988)	87 users one year before center opened and one year later	Pre/post test of users compared to control group, parents on waiting list and other bank employees	Center users absent 1.7 days less than other parents; maternity leaves were 1.2 weeks shorter for center users; 61% of job applicants said center was a factor in accepting a job at banks. Turnover and public relations also positively affected
Dominion Bank-Roanoke, VA	Burge & Stewart (1988)	400 randomly selected employees	Post-survey of all employees and users	Users believe that the center helped reduce absenteeism and aided recruitment and improved productivity
Methodist Hospital	(1984)	123 users of center	Post survey of user perceptions (71% response)	Center helped keep 41% of users; 51% said center was a factor in accepting job; 61% said productivity improved; 79% said morale increased

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RESEARCH SITE	RESEARCHER/CITE	SAMPLE	RESEARCH DESIGN	MAJOR FINDINGS
State of New York Children's Place, Albany, NY	WRI (1980)	88 users of center 1 year after open-	Post survey of user (66% response)	35% of users said center enabled them to stay working; 73% said absences declined; 47% said productivity increased; 83% said they worry less
Kid's Play, State of Wisconsin Pilot Day Care Center	State (1987)	56 users 35 supervisors of center users	User perceptions surveyed before enrollment, 5 months after opening and 17 months after. Manager perceptions also surveyed	89% users satisfied with center quality. 73% said center helped them be more productive; 82% said center reduced worry and had positive effect on scheduling
Ina S. Thompson Child Care Center-State of Florida	Department of Administration (1987)	37-62 users 42 supervisors of center users	User perceptions surveyed 9 months after opening and interviewed 1 year later. Interviews with managers	Users reported positive effects on works. Center helped reduce worry about children, 49% said they were absent less, 60% were late less, and 93% would consider child care before changing jobs
Multiple Companies-National with child care	Perry (1978)	58 employers, most with on-site centers	Survey of manager perceptions	Two-thirds or more of managers believe that the child care program helps recruit, lowers absenteeism, and improves attitudes toward company

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RESEARCH SITE	RESEARCHER/CITE	SAMPLE	RESEARCH DESIGN	MAJOR FINDINGS
Multiple Companies-National with child care	Mayid (1983)	204 employers with child care programs, mostly on-site	Survey of manager perceptions	Asked to rank the five most significant effects of their child care program, managers listed listed recruitment; morale, lower absenteeism and turnover.
Multiple Companies-child care	Burud, et. al. (1984)	178 employers most with on-site centers	Survey of manager perceptions	Managers believe that turnover, productivity, morale, and recruitment were positively affected by center while absenteeism and tardiness were reduced
Statewide Survey of Employers-Minnesota	AAUW (1982)	563 firms with and without child care	Survey of manager perceptions in 200 randomly select companies and subsequent interviews	More than two-thirds of companies believed that child care support would decrease absenteeism and tardiness and increase productivity, recruitment, retention, and morale
Statewide Survey of Employers-New York	Governor's Commission on Child Care (1986)	1041 firms with and without child care	Survey of manager perceptions in 10,558 firms	Belief in child care's ability to improve work performance is related to company size, with larger companies more likely to believe that recruitment, retention, absenteeism, tardiness stress and morale are are positively affected.

Table 1

DIRECTION OF W-F CONFLICT

(Percent of employees in the sample who said that work and family responsibilities interfered with each other in some way.)

	Work Interferes with Family		Family Interferes with Work	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Fortune (1987)	32%	41%	16%	18%
Fernandez (1986)	22	43	13	39
Merck & Co., Inc. (1986)	37	41	18	21
Large Chemical Company	35	56		

Table 2

PERCEPTIONS OF MANAGERS REGARDING EFFECTS OF EMPLOYER-SPONSORED CHILD CARE CENTER

	Managers of Center Users			Managers in Multiple Companies with Child Care			Managers in Multiple Companies with and Without Child Care	
	Dominion Bank 1988	WI 1987	Florida 1987	Perry 1978	Magid 1983	Burud 1984	Minnesota 1982	New York 1986
Improves Productivity	**48%**	60%	38%	%	*	49%	72%	32%
Improves Motivation		43			67	63		
Improves Satisfaction		66			170	83		
Improves Attitude Towards Work	40			55				
Improves Morale	**70**	**88**			345	**90**	**85**	**44**
Reduces Absenteeism	45	71	**62**	**72**	**214**	53	**89**	**42**
Reduces Tardiness	33	54	43		88	36	67	36
Reduces Stress								41
Increases Scheduling Flexibility						50		
Reduces Turnover		23		57	211	65	71	39
Improves Attitude Towards Employer				65				
Increases Loyalty/ Commitment						73		35
Increase Women Returning from Leave		43			208	79		
Improves Recruitment				**88**	**448**	**85**	73	35
Improves Public Image/ Publicity		**77**		60	137	80		
Increases Availability of Temporary Help					26			
Improves Quality of Work Force					205	42		
Increases Equal Employment Opportunity					13	40		
Improves Community Relations				36	154	**85**		
Improves Quality of Products/Services	30				48	37		
Increases Profits							41	
Reduced Training Costs								14

Bold face numbers indicate the first and second highest rankings
***The Magid study findings are not percentages, they are rank orderings**

Table 3

Perceptions of Employees Using Employer-Sponsored Child Care Centers

	Dominion Bank	Methodist Hospital	Southeastern Hospital	State of Wisconsin	State of Florida	State of New York
Improves Productivity	67	61	51	**73**	60	**47**
Increases Motivation				72		
Increases Job Satisfaction						
Improves Morale		**79**				
Decreases Absenteeism	**84**	**75**	67	72		
Decreases Tardiness	60	**79**	**60**	46	60	
Reduces Stress					57	**83**
Improves Scheduling Flexibility	40	69		**82**		
Able to Work More Overtime	63	62				
Able to Work Odd Shifts		43	42			
Reduces Turnover	70	41	**72**	25	43	35
Improves Attitude Towards Employer					**84**	
Increases Women Returning from Leave		33				45
Improves Recruitment		51			81	
Improves Public Image					**87**	
Would Recommend Employer	**74**					
Improves Promotability		17				

Bold face numbers indicate the first and second highest rankings

Table 4

Findings from Experimental Studies

	Krug, et. al (1972)	Milkovich, et. al (1976)	Youngblood et. al. (1984)	Dawson et. al (1984)	Marquart (1988)	Union Bank (1988)
Improves Productivity/ Performance		o		*		+
Increases Job Satisfaction			*		o	
Improves Morale						+
Improves Organizational Climate			*			
Decreases Absenteeism	--	*	o	o	+	+
Decreases Tardiness	--					+
Reduces Stress					o	
Able to Work Overtime				*		
Reduces Turnover		*	*	*	*	+
Increases Loyalty/ Commitment			*		o	
Increases Women Returning From Leave						+
Improves Recruitment	+			*	*	+
Would Recommend Employer				*	*	
Improves Community/ Public Relations						+
Improves Promotability				o		

* Statistically significant differences found between center users and companion group(s).

+ Differences found between center users and others, but no statistical test proved it.

o No differences found, or couldn't measure the outcome in question.

- The opposite effect occurred, e.g., absenteeism increased.

Table 5

Effects of Child Care Support on Employees' Work Behavior:
Percent Believing Support has Positive Effect by Size of Company

	Size of Company			
(BASE)	Up to 100 (285)	101-500 (253)	501-1500 (220)	Over 1500 (204)
Recruitment	29.1%	34.0%	44.6%	47.6%
Retention	33.0	34.8	49.5	52.9
Absenteeism	31.6	41.5	54.1	56.9
Tardiness	27.0	36.4	47.3	48.5
Stress	32.3	40.3	53.2	54.9
Morale	37.2	44.7	57.3	54.4
Loyalty	32.6	34.8	44.1	41.2
Training Costs	12.6	13.5	17.3	18.1
Productivity	27.0	30.4	40.0	40.2

Source: New York State Commission on Child Care. Employers and Child Care in New York State, (1986) p. 26.

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